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Bakalářská práce

The Readers' Reception of Roald Dahl's
Books. Children and Adult Readers and Their
Way to the Grotesque
Recepce knih Roalda Dahla dětskými a
dospělými čtenáři. Groteska v tvorbě R. Dahla

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Abstract

The aim of my bachelor thesis is a comparison of the grotesque in Roald Dahl's work intended for children and for adults. In the theoretical part the definition of the grotesque and black humour will be given in general. Subsequently, the next part will be dedicated to the comparison of the grotesque and black humour in Dahl's work for children and for adult readers. The core will include literary analysis of the grotesque in Dahl's poetry for children *Revolting Rhymes*, in short stories for adult readers *Kiss, Kiss* and analysis of prose *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. In the practical part of the thesis, the topic of violence and literary hyperbole will be analysed as well as reception of film adaptations of Dahl's books.

Key words: Roald Dahl, the grotesque, black humour, analysis, children, adults

Anotace

Předmětem zájmu bakalářské práce je srovnání pojetí groteskna v tvorbě Roalda Dahla určené pro děti a pro dospělé čtenáře. V teoretické části se práce pokusí definovat pojetí grotesky a roli černého humoru v povídkové tvorbě a v autorově dětské literatuře. Jádrem výzkumu bude literárněvědná analýza groteskních prvků Dahlovy poezie pro děti *Revoltinĝ Rhymes*, povídkové tvorby z výborů *Kiss, Kiss* a dále zpracování autorovy prózy *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Součástí recepce vybraných textů bude analýza motivů násilí a literární hyperboly včetně recepce filmových zpracování Dahlových děl.

Klíčová slova: Roald Dahl, groteska, černý humor, analýza, děti, dospělí

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1. Introduction

I have based my thesis upon the analysis of Roald Dahl's work for children and for adults. I have chosen two books intended for children, namely *Charlie and the Chocolate factory* and *Revolting Rhymes* and compared to them a collection of short stories *Kiss Kiss* will be analysed. The analysis will be realized on the theoretical bases of concepts such as humour, grotesque and perception of humour with child readers.

The first part of the thesis focuses on Roald Dahl's biography. I will try to describe Dahl's life which was very interesting. Moreover, I will attempt to outline his childhood and roots of his family. However, the main focus of the biography will be his adulthood and the events and the things which influenced his writing career the most. I will not miss even his own family life and the point when Roald Dahl decided to focus on literature for children.

Subsequently, I will try to define the grotesque not only as a literary genre, but also its historical development and the features of the grotesque. The development of the word grotesque will be mentioned as well.

The definition of humour will follow with the focus on black humour which is used genuinely often in the books of Roald Dahl. The following chapter will be dedicated to humour in children's literature and dealing with themes which children find funny at various ages.

The succeeding chapter will be dedicated to humorous features which Roald Dahl uses in his book intended for children. I will describe the way he uses incongruity, derision and humour of the taboo topics. Thereafter, I will dedicate a short chapter to Roald Dahl's works for adult readers, and his writing procedures will be mentioned.

In the core of my thesis, I will analyse subsequently *Charlie and the Chocolate factory*, *Revolting Rhymes* and *Kiss Kiss*. I will mainly focus on the occurrence of the grotesque and humorous features in his writing style and each feature will be supported from the book where it could be found. In conclusion, the short comparison of Roald Dahl's differences of writing style for children and for adults will be given.

2. The Biography of Roald Dahl

Dahl's father Harald was from a lower middle-class family. He lost a part of his hand in an accident but it never stopped him from making a successful career. His first wife died and he was left with two children who he raised alone until he met Sofie, Roald's mother. Sofie came from a long line of clergymen. She moved to Villa Marie in Wales and after marriage with Harald she took care of her step-children and she started her own family. She gave birth to two daughters, Astri and Alfhild, and to her only son Roald who was born on the 13. September 1916 in Llandaff. He was named after a Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen who reached the South Pole in 1911. Unfortunately, in 1917 Astri died at the age of seven and Harald passed away two months later. Sofie was left pregnant, but luckily had financial support.¹

In 1925 Roald was sent to the St Peter's boarding school which was assigned for boys aged between eight and thirteen. Roald described the school as a gloomy place where everybody took it too seriously and the headmaster Francis was described as a crazy monster who enjoyed beating little boys with his rod collection. The school environment, with dormitories with cold water and terrible conditions turned out to be an awful shock for a boy who was used to a comfort. Later he pretended to have appendicitis and he was sent back home where the local doctor quickly discovered the truth. They made a deal and after three days at home Roald was sent back to school. After his return, he commenced doing sport. Despite the Spartan discipline at the St Peter's school, pupils were well educated in literature and music as well. "Once, Roald gave his friend a copy of Ambrose Bierce's 1893 collection of grand guignol short stories *Can Such Things Be?* as a birthday present. The book was so important to him that, almost sixty years later, Roald asked his friend whether he could have it back."² At the age of twelve, he started noticing differences between accents and it was fascinating experience for him.

¹ TREGLOWN, Jeremy. *Roald Dahl: A Biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994

² STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: The Authorized Biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011., p. 55-56

After moving to London, Dahl's family usually spent Easter holidays on the coast of Wales in the seaside resort in Tenby. However, it was nothing compared to summer holidays which they spent in Norway. However, Dahl was not interested in historical details of his family, his mother, Sophie Magdalene made sure, that he could speak Norwegian fluently. They often went fishing into the fjords and in the evening his mother told stories. Despite the fact that he loved Norway, he considered rural England his home. Dahl was very proud to be British. "Though born in Britain, and a British citizen, in many ways Dahl retained the psychology of an émigré. Later in his life people forgot that."³

In January 1930, Dahl left to attend Repton boarding school. On the train, he met Ben Reuss who was immediately stroked by Dahl's sense of humour. At night, he arrived at The Priory, which was one of the boarding houses. Later Dahl described it as a curious system, because the boarding house was a place where he slept, ate, studied and made friends. It was almost impossible to make friends at other places. During his studies at Repton, Geoffrey Fischer was a headmaster. Twenty years later Fischer was named the Archbishop of Canterbury and Queen Elisabeth II. was crowned by him at Westminster Abbey. Consequently, publishing *Boy* in 1984 caused a sensation because in the book Fischer is described as a cruel and sadistic flogger. This experience made Dahl doubt about the organization of English society and about the existence of God.⁴ Despite everything, the biggest bullies at Repton were boys themselves, especially those who were good at sport. Even though Roald was not an obvious target, he felt miserable very often. During his studies at Repton he not only deepened his interest in literature but also in music and photography. He became a good sportsman as well, excelling in hockey, football, golf or cricket.⁵ In 1933 he finished school. "He had decided that he neither wanted to go to university nor to do missionary work or some other fatuous thing. His father's trust would provide him a modest income, so there was no immediate pressure to find a job. What he desired was adventure."⁶

³ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: The Authorized Biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011., p. 19

⁴ TREGLOWN, Roald Dahl: *A Biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994.

⁵ TREGLOWN, Roald Dahl: *A Biography*.

⁶ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller*, p. 91

In summer 1934, he participated in a four-week trek across an unexplored area of Newfoundland, which was organized by Public School Exploring Society. It was a difficult and exhausting experience and during the march they ran out of food and their tents were leaked. “The expedition was led by George Murray Levick, the founder of the Public School Exploring Society, and a survivor of an expedition to the Antarctic.”⁷ As soon as Dahl returned, he joined the Shell company and he spent some time working in a refinery. In 1938 Roald was sent to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. “By that time the British prime minister Neville Chamberlain had just returned from his meeting with Hitler in Munich and announced to the world that he had won peace for his time. Dahl was one of many who did not believe it.”⁸ Time spent in Tanzania forced him to learn how to maintain a household. He regularly wrote letters to his family and he also sent them a lot of presents such as furs or jewellery.

In 1939, when the war was unavoidable, Roald counselled his family to move from Kent back to Wales. But his mother and sisters were stubborn and they refused to leave their social life and they believed that a cellar would make effective air-raid shelter. At that time, emergency restrictions forbade him to leave East Africa and Dahl fantasized about joining King’s African Rifles. However, the Royal Air Force was recruiting in Nairobi and Dahl saw it as an opportunity. He would be taught how to fly without any charge. Although he had immense reflexes he was too tall to fit comfortably in a cockpit. Apart from this, he really enjoyed flying. In September 1940 Dahl was ferrying an old-fashioned and unfamiliar plane toward a disguised airstrip to join 80 Squadron at a confidential location. ⁹Although, he stopped twice to refuel, somewhere over the North Africa, his fuel gauge fell and he decided to land. “It took seven months before anyone in 80 Squadron saw Dahl again. He was blind for several weeks, and the injuries to his head, nose and back were such that it was almost two months before he was sufficiently recovered to get out of hospital bed in Alexandria. It turned out to be the most intense period of his life, and certainly the most dangerous.”¹⁰ The accident had left him with dreadful headaches which worsened

⁷ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: The Authorized Biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011, p. 94

⁸ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller*, p. 114

⁹ TREGLOWN, Jeremy. *Roald Dahl: A Biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994

¹⁰ TREGLOWN, Jeremy. *Roald Dahl: A Biography*., p. 25

so bad that he was unable to serve anymore and he was sent home. “Of all the shocking things that happened, death affected him the most – the deaths of his young friends and the deaths of the young man he had to kill. His way of coping was by trying to be indifferent, or not caring.”¹¹

Dahl arrived home in 1941, but it was difficult for him to find his family which moved out from Kent due to bombing. Their reunion after three years was genuinely emotional. However, his return was not just about recovery. The RAF had plenty of jobs for him, like helping to recruit and train more pilots. Those jobs he did not enjoy at all. After a strange meeting with a member of parliament he was offered a job at the British Embassy in Washington, D.C. His job description was to embolden very influential members of the US government to support Britain in the war. Roald was reminding them what was the RAF’s job and what terrible time British people had. Even though this job looked like a lot of parties and socializing, underneath it was all about gathering and sending information.¹²

In North America, he met a wounded pilot whose name was Douglas Bisgood. During World War II, RAF pilots had their own slang and it can be said that they also invented their own folklore. They created stories about little boisterous imp-like beings who lived around the planes which they called “gremlins”. “Roald and Douglas swapped folklore and made up new stories about gremlins.”¹³ However, he continued at his work for RAF, his head was full of ideas about “gremlins”. He decided to write a story about them. Though, he was still in the services of the RAF and he answered to them, the bosses were the first ones who read the story about “gremlins” and Dahl needed their approval. Then he sent his work to the magazine where it was published for the first time.¹⁴ After this, he was invited to Hollywood to make a movie about the RAF legend and the gremlins. Dahl was a very fortunate man because his story got into hands of Walt Disney. Although his first book was written and Disney wanted to make a movie from it Dahl was not happy. He was not satisfied with a look which Disney designed for “the Gremlins”. In the end, Disney abandoned the project and told

¹¹ ROSEN, Michael. *Fantastic Mr. Dahl*. London: Puffin, 2012., p. 106

¹² TREGLOWN, Jeremy. *Roald Dahl: A Biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994.

¹³ ROSEN, *Fantastic Mr. Dahl*,

¹⁴ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: The Authorized Biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Dahl that it is not his intention to finish this movie. However, although it seemed like the end, it was just the opposite. This encouraged Roald to continue writing and his career had just started.¹⁵

As a young good-looking man in a uniform, he was popular among women. Especially, the older ones were playing a big part in his life. “A host of wealthy, glamorous older women crossed Dahl’s path. Most made little impression. None of these encounters seems to have involved him in any serious emotional commitment.”¹⁶ However, there was one woman who saw through his profligate, assured appearance. The French actress named Annabella who was sophisticated and sexually experienced. Since 1939, she had been married to Tyrone Power, who was her third husband. Their marriage appeared to be a very unconventional one, because both parties wallowed in other relationships. At the time she met Roald, her husband was in love with another person. Anabelle and Roald first met at the party where she made an immediate impression.¹⁷ Even after their break up, they remained close friends for the rest of their lives.

In 1945 he finished his services for British Security Coordination and he received a letter where they were thanking him for what he had done and recapitulating his successes. He finally boarded the Queen Elizabeth at the beginning of February in 1946 and set off to his homeland. Dahl always remained abnormally prudent about his wartime work in the USA and he took his secrets from that time with him to the grave. When he saw England after such a long time, he remained shocked. The cities were destroyed after bombing and people seemed disillusioned and anxious.

Roald returned from the USA determined to become a full-time writer and a small RAF invalid pension and money from his father’s trust fund provided him a good start.¹⁸ “He began to write short stories for adults and sent them to his agent in America, where they were published.”¹⁹ His first collection of short stories was

¹⁵ ROSEN, Michael. *Fantastic Mr. Dahl*, London: Puffin, 2012., p. 106

¹⁶ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: The Authorized Biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011, p. 234

¹⁷ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller*

¹⁸ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller*

¹⁹ ROSEN, Michael. *Fantastic Mr. Dahl*, p. 123

named *Over to You* and it was published in January 1946 just as he was leaving New York. The collection was reviewed quite positively. And Dahl was really pleased when he received a congratulatory letter from Maxwell Perkins who was a legend in the American publishing world. When Roald arrived in the UK in 1946, he had already known that his next book would be a novel. It was a difficult time for him. He was still shaken by the World War II, he missed his friends in New York and he felt isolated. Moreover, he did not get any moral support from his family or friends. The people who believed in him the most were in the USA. There were two things which kept him sane and those were listening to music and his dogs. Roald suffered from backache which became so unbearable, that in winter 1946 that doctors recommended surgery of the spine. Roald's another publication was named *Some Time Never* and it could be perceived as a satiric response to the after-war situation, or as a book which deals with his existential struggles. The first person who read it at Scribner's publishing house was the poet John Hall Wheelock who was immediately enthusiastic about the novel. Wheelock sent a copy to Perkins's home in Connecticut and said to Roald, that Perkins was in the middle of reading it. Dahl waited nervously for a verdict which unfortunately never came because Perkins died of pneumonia. Even after recommended changes in the book Wheelock was persuaded that publishing the novel would be a risk because it did not belong to Scribner's "usual categories" and it might be problematic to sell. When the book was finally published in April 1948 it was a disappointment. It did not sell and it was not controversial. Dahl felt crushed and even if he was determined to continue in writing, this was a wound he would never forget. After success of his third story collection *Kiss, Kiss* in 1960, he was approached to reprint *Some Time Never*. He refused and even after many years he did not want his children to read this book.²⁰

"Despite being surrounded by his family, Roald was dogged by something akin to depression."²¹ Only time spent with children made him feel better. Although, he often played with his nieces and nephew, he could not omit that his relationship with his mother Sofie Magdalene worsened significantly. It was a problematic time and neither Sofie Magdalene nor Roald had an understanding for each other. In early 1948 he

²⁰ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: The Authorized Biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011

²¹ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller*, p. 277

travelled to Jamaica, flying via Senegal and Brazil. It was an escape from everyday life and all his problems. However, when he returned to England problems of daily existence wore him down again. He also ran out of money. The turnover came when Collier's magazine bought some of his tales. The cash from those stories allowed Dahl to continue with writing, and with his passion, greyhound racing.

In 1951 he returned to America and a year later he met Patricia Neal who was a famous actress. "They fell in love, and in 1953 got married and returned to England to live near Roald's mother. But they did not live there all the time, the couple travelled between Britain and the USA so that Pat could act in films. At the same time, they brought up their children: Olivia (1955), Tessa (1957), Theo (1960), Ophelia (1964) and Lucy (1965)."²² In the meantime, Roald continued writing stories for adults. He wallowed in fiction. Probably spending so much time with his own family might be one of the reasons why he started with children's literature. In the spring of 1960 he showed *James and the Giant Peach* to his wife and to Sheila St Lawrence, who both reacted very enthusiastically. It was published in 1961 and although the year started well, three tragic events happened.²³

The first tragedy happened when his son Theo was hit in his pram by a taxi in New York city. Fortunately, after a complicated treatment he survived. Dahl started a cooperation with a toymaker and a surgeon and they invented a device which would help patients after accident. It became well known as a Dahl-Wade-Till valve and it was used to treat thousands of children all over the world. Dahl turn out to be a surprisingly good inventor. Roald was looking after children when Pat was filming in New York and meanwhile he was working on his next story *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. But then, the second tragedy happened. His daughter Olivia passed away from measles' complications at the age of seven. After this tragedy, he was determined that his remaining children would receive the measles vaccination. Roald was very depressed about his daughter's death and he found some hope in charity work for children. The charity called International Help for Children supported illegitimate children which were abandoned by their families. The illness of his wife Pat was the last tragedy. She suffered a huge stroke and it looked like Pat would not be able to use her body.

²² ROSEN, Michael. *Fantastic Mr. Dahl*. [illustrated by Quentin Blake]. London: Puffin, 2012, p. 123

²³ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: The Authorized Biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Roald refused to give up and took charge of her care, which helped her. She got better and after some time she returned to acting.²⁴

Since he was a child, Dahl was fascinated by chocolate. During his studies at Repton, his housemaster arranged chocolate tasting with the marketing department of Cadbury's. It repeated every year. This passion continued into adulthood. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which was published in 1964, is his most famous book of all. There were plans to turn it into a film and after publishing. Everyone was talking about Roald Dahl, but not always in a good way. Back then, in 1960s, there was a big effort to make black people and white people equal and many people thought that the Oompa-Loompas represent black people. Although, no abusive words could him stop from writing. "By the end of the 1970s Roald had published five more books for children, which were *The Magic Finger*, *Fantastic Mr Fox*, *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*, *Danny the Champion of the World* and *The Enormous Crocodile*. In 1977 Roald's granddaughter Sofie was born. At this point of time, Roald and Pat's life together was drifting apart and in 1983 they were divorced."²⁵ By the end of the same year, Roald was married again. His new wife was named Felicity, who he called Licky. She had three children, so with Roald's children from previous marriage they were now seven children.

When he published *The BFG*, he admitted, the main character Sophie was inspired by his granddaughter. At that time, Dahl's house was always full of noise and people. People said that he has his own gang. In the 1980s he was already world-famous and millions of people were buying his books. His other books *Boy* and *Going Solo*, published in 1986, were mix of autobiography and a collection of his imagination.²⁶ At the end of 1980's he was suffering from back pain and later he was diagnosed leukaemia. Although, he had some restrictions from the doctors, nothing kept him from his enjoyments. Despite the illness, he continued in writing. *The Minpins* and *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke* were published after his death. In 1990 he was hospitalized in Oxford because of unrelenting pain. "He died on 23 November 1990 and he is buried on the hillside opposite his house. After the funeral Felicity Dahl

²⁴ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller: The Authorized Biography of Roald Dahl*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011.

²⁵ ROSEN, Michael. *Fantastic Mr. Dahl*, London: Puffin, 2012, p. 129

²⁶ STURROCK, Donald. *Storyteller*

divided the heritage fairly and generously. Half of Roald's belongings were divided between his children and the second half used Felicity to set up a charity in her husband's name. The foundation gives grants each year to different problems, which affected Dahl's life, such as hematology, literacy or neurology."²⁷

²⁷ TREGLOWN, Jeremy. *Roald Dahl: A Biography*. London: Faber and Faber, 1994, p. 321

3. The Grotesque

3.1. A Historical Development

A term Grotesque has undergone a wide development. Firstly, it was probably used in the Roman Empire when from an Italian word *grotte* came an adjective *grottesco* and lately a noun *la grottesca* which represented a style of combining human, animal and vegetable elements in one painting. These paintings were marked as confusing, monstrous and ridiculous. On the other hand, the classical critics were mostly furious about breaking the principles. “This attitude towards grotesque has been common ever since, particularly in ages where classical notions of art and literature prevail.”²⁸ The Term Grotesque starts to appear in literature in France in the sixteenth century, however the expansion to England and Germany came later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was associated with such names as Victor Hugo, John Ruskin, Friedrich Schlegel or Walter Bagehot. According to John Ruskin “some types of grotesque in the hands of noble men with true spiritual awareness, are great, and may take their place with all but the very highest examples of art. He distinguishes between “noble” or “true” and “ignoble” or “false” grotesque.” His analysis is notable mainly because of highlighting the playful element in the grotesque. Even Friedrich Schlegel claimed in his writings that playfulness is a significant element in the grotesque. One extremely important point was that Victor Hugo correlated the grotesque with the real world and not with something fantastic. He claimed that the grotesque is not just an artistic mode but it exists around us. In the Book *Robert Browning* written by G. K. Chesterton makes the statement that the grotesque may be used as a means of presenting the world in a new light without any falsification. This statement became truly important in the twentieth century. “Chesterton looks at the grotesque in three ways: as a reflection of the real world, as an artistic mode and as the product of a certain kind of temperament. The latter consideration involves of course psychological analysis

²⁸ THOMSON, Philip. *The Grotesque*. Reprinted. London: Methuen, 1972, p. 12

and speculation.”²⁹ One of the attempts to define the grotesque belongs to Wolfgang Kayser who claims that the grotesque is the expression of the alienated world. The familiar world which, from the different perspective, suddenly appears as a strange place.³⁰

3.2. Definition and Characteristics of the Grotesque

As Philip Thomson mentioned in his book *The Grotesque* and as I described in the preceding chapter *The Historical development*, there is no constant meaning of the grotesque. Although, it might appear difficult to define the grotesque, the author of *The Grotesque* tried to define it as “the unresolved clash of incompatibles in work and response” or as “the ambivalently abnormal”³¹

In the context of the grotesque, there are specific repetitive notions. One of them is the disharmony which does not refer to the work of art as much as to reactions which it produces. The same situation might seem funny to one person, though another one might see it as offensive. Another often appearing characteristics of the grotesque is a contrast between the comic and terrifying. In the evolution of the grotesque there appeared many authors who stand on the side of the comic or terrifying, though modern approaches have the tendency to view the grotesque as a mixture of both. It has always been generally agreed that the grotesque is extravagant, that it has a market element of exaggeration, of extremeness, about it.³² With these terms mentioned above, the abnormality is also associated. The abnormal may be perceived as something funny and amusing, however, on the other hand it may be perceived as something fearsome or repulsive. Moreover, there is a very deformed line between these two perceptions. Caricature is also one of the notions often connected with the grotesque. “It can be defined as the ludicrous exaggeration of characteristic or peculiar features.”³³

²⁹ THOMSON, Philip. *The Grotesque*, p. 17

³⁰ THOMSON, Philip. *The Grotesque*

³¹ THOMSON, Philip. *The Grotesque*, p. 27

³² THOMSON, Philip. *The Grotesque*

³³ THOMSON, Philip. *The Grotesque*, p. 38

4. Humour

Humour is a term which is often confused with laughter. Nevertheless, it is not the same at all. It is possible to be entertained without laughter and the other way round. It has a very variable character and it could be said that humour is changing from one moment to another. The changes have occurred as our society developed or our sense of humour could easily change as we grow from a child to an adult person. Although it cannot be said that there are not humorous things with no age barriers, it is more frequent that our sense of humour changes. It also depends on the other factors such as intellectual ability, past experience and the level of sophistication of comic material.³⁴

4.1. Development of Humour with Age

According to research which was done by Kappas in 1967 and Klause in 1987 it can be said that children find for example exaggeration, surprise, slapstick, the absurd, verbal humour, human predicaments, ridicule, defiance, violence and incongruity as funny elements. However, the popularity of the elements listed above could be variable with the age.

For pre-school children, especially for the younger ones, the incongruity is a huge source of fun. They find funny when adults do things they should not do, such as pretending to suck a baby's bottle and so on. When they get older the main source of fun is misnaming of objects and people. In Pre-school age children start to realize the advantages of telling jokes and riddles. At the age of six to eight, children still enjoy reversing of roles and visual incongruity. From about eight years of age, they start to appreciate two possible answers of riddles. The straight one and the funny one and they prefer the books which contain puns. During the upper primary years, so-called "sick jokes" which reflect current events, begin to be popular and shared. Later they can appreciate parody, absurdity and exaggeration.³⁵ "By late primary school and early high

³⁴ MALLAN, Kerry. *Laugh Lines: Exploring Humour in Children's Literature*. Illustrated by David Cox. Newtown, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association, 1993.

³⁵ MALLAN, Kerry. *Laugh Lines*

school, grossness is a popular channel for humour. This originates partly in teenagers' desire to break away from childhood and adult codes of acceptable behaviour. Teenagers are still egocentric and enjoy reading stories about people like themselves and their peers."³⁶

4.2. Black Humour

The possible first mention of black humour falls into the American literature of the late 1950s' and 1960. Black humour finds humour in situations or things which are usually perceived as tragic, inappropriate or offensive. Black humour or in other words dark humour are usually jokes about topics such as religion, death, sexual orientation, skin colour etc.³⁷

A new study in the journal *Cognitive Processing* has tested whether intelligence plays the same role in the appreciation of sick or black humour: the kind of jokes that make light of death, illness and the vulnerable. Ulrike Willinger from the Medical University of Vienna led 14 researches where 156 participants with an average age of 33 were asked to rate their comprehension and enjoyment of 12 black humour cartoons which were taken from *The Black Book* written by Uli Stein. The research showed that the supreme enjoyment and comprehension had people with the highest IQ. Those people were usually better educated, they scored best in IQ verbal and non-verbal tests. On the other hand, their scores in the bad mood and aggression tests were the lowest.

³⁶ MALLAN, Kerry. *Laugh Lines: Exploring Humour in Children's Literature*. Illustrated by David Cox. Newtown, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association, 1993, p. 7

³⁷ *Black Comedy* | The Drama Teacher. The Drama Teacher

5. Humour in Children's Literature

According to Beckman, three primary elements can be earmarked in children's humorous literature. Those are character, situation and discourse.

5.1. Humorous characters

In literature, the exaggeration of human qualities and weaknesses is used to create humorous characters. However, to achieve the appreciation, children need to be familiar with the type of person whose character is being satirized. One of the possible ways is mocking of authority figures. Obviously, for children the usual target is a teacher. Other possibility which authors use is the innocent child who is usually exceedingly sincere and sometimes naïve. The humorous situations often arise from the juxtaposition of the character's worldview and perception of situations compared to the reality of what is actually happening. It is often better when readers are a little older than the character. This could enable them to laugh more contentedly.³⁸

5.2. Humorous situations

According to Mallan, the situational humour is usually created by the absurd element which is inserted into otherwise conventional circumstances. The situational humour is often connected with nonsense. The situational humour also includes the motif of transformation, for example when a prince is turned into a frog. The contemporary writers gladly use the transformation to create comic situations. Another favourite type of the situational humour is the comedy of chaos. According to Monahan, such comedy laughs in desperation at a world that has gotten out of control. This type can coalesce into black humour and it is highly appreciated by teenagers, though on the other hand it is frequently misunderstood by adults who find it disturbing or unpleasant.³⁹

³⁸ MALLAN, Kerry. *Laugh Lines: Exploring Humour in Children's Literature*. Illustrated by David Cox. Newtown, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association, 1993.

³⁹ MALLAN, Kerry. *Laugh Lines*.

5.3. Humorous discourse

This type of humour seems to be appreciated especially by older children who are at least partially sophisticated in language and who have some literary experience. They enjoy incongruities, nonsense talk and many others. One of the forms of word play is called Spoonerism. This form is enjoyed mostly by children, though adults appreciate it as well. “The term ‘spoonerism’ was coined after Reverend W. A. Spooner, who often muddled his words by transposing their initial letters. Not strictly the spoonerism, but something closely related is used by Roald Dahl in *The Vicar of Nibbleswicke* where the innocent Vicar suffers from ‘back-to-front dyslexia’.”⁴⁰ The other type appreciated by children is name-calling, which is, according to Beckman, considered as one of the most common type of humour. Puns are also extremely popular with children of all age however slang is not staying behind. Not forgetting to mention the last type, which is parody. It usually appears in works for older readers. It depends on the awareness of the object being parodied.⁴¹

⁴⁰ MALLAN, Kerry. *Laugh Lines: Exploring Humour in Children's Literature*. Illustrated by David Cox. Newtown, Australia: Primary English Teaching Association, 1993

⁴¹ MALLAN, Kerry. *Laugh Lines*.

6. Humour in Roald Dahl's Works for Children

In creating humour there has always been an unclear boundary between what we find humorous and what is objectionable. Experimenting with humour and disgust can be used to define acceptable behaviour, nevertheless it might be used to find the boundary of the acceptable and overstep it. Even though we acknowledge some social boundary of humour, every human being could have the border line a little bit amended or modified.

It seems obvious that Western culture finds Roald Dahl's books funny. Although, "Dahl's humour is often seen as low-brow and unsophisticated, or catering to the basest impulses of children. Adult readers in particular, have not always appreciated how Dahl gleefully makes fun of many things that we piously teach children that they should not even notice, let alone laugh at, such as gender, appearance, weight, disability, and so on."⁴² Obviously, it is not surprising that many of Dahl's books were censored. According to the People For the American Way, Roald Dahl's book *Witches* was one of the ten most censored books between 1982 and 1994. It is considered as the most controversial book which was written by Dahl. However, not only was this book censored and attacked, but also several others have been attacked, such as *The Big Friendly Giant*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *The Enormous Crocodile*, *George's Marvelous Machine*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *Matilda*, *The Minipins*, *Rhyme Stew* and *Revolting Rhymes*. Dahl was one of the targets of censors in Stafford County, Virginia who claimed that Dahl has been encouraging children to disobey their parents in his books.⁴³ Although this works for adults, children could see it differently. "For children in particular, humour can – among other functions – help them to work through anxieties about impending maturity. Dahl astutely recognized and sought to assuage the anxieties that young readers might be wrestling with, offering them explosive form of release through laughter."⁴⁴ For this purpose Dahl used several techniques and topics such as incongruity, taboo or derision.

⁴² ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER. *Roald Dahl*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 31

⁴³ EDITED BY NICHOLAS J. KAROLIDES. *Censored Books II: Critical Viewpoints*, 1985-2000. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press, 2002.

⁴⁴ ALSTON, BUTLER, *Roald Dahl*, p. 32

6.1. Incongruity

Incongruity is often used by humourists who use a particular set of anticipations and suddenly unexpectedly change it. Dahl enjoyed playing with incongruity in situations which could be seen humorous or appalling. Some parts in his books may be seen horrendous and abusive, however Dahl makes the situation amusing in several ways. Especially by assuring the reader that there are no consequences for children. The tension between horror and humour can be well seen in the poem ‘*The Crocodile*’ from *Dirty Beasts*. The poem starts as a frighteningly entertaining story about Crocky-Wock who enjoys preparing his meals from children. At this part the reader does not feel threatened because the author is talking about imaginary unnamed children. Although than the narrative changes by claiming to hear something coming up the stairs. At this point it extremely depends on the mood of the reader. If the parent established playful and safety mood, children are amused by the story and the only screams we might hear are those full of delight and enjoyment.⁴⁵ “However, if the child is abused and if the home does not feel like a safe place, then the category disruption may be taken as horrifying and frightening instead of humorous”⁴⁶

6.2. Humour and the taboo

Humour and disgust are closely related to taboo which is usually violating or cultural and it can be received rather with laughter or with contempt and disgust. Dahl uses it very often, especially Dahl’s poetry is full of examples of humour of the taboo. The first poem in book *Dirty Beasts*, *The Pig* deals with a taboo topic of cannibalism. From an easy topic Dahl moves to the queasy discussion of what we should and should not eat, however even his other books are not spared of humour of the taboo topics.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER. *Roald Dahl*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012..

⁴⁶ ALSTON, BUTLER, *Roald Dahl*, p. 35

⁴⁷ ALSTON, BUTLER, *Roald Dahl*.

6.3. Derision

According to Frank MacHovec “derision theory is based on the premise that we laugh down at others. Its basic drive is to humiliate, to subjugate, to disparage. The feeling tone is hostile and aggressive, its attitude negative and pessimistic”⁴⁸ Especially because of the vicious spirit, derisive humour in children’s literature is often disapproved of adult readers. Some readers might find usage of derision in Dahl’s books low and despicable. Disgust can be also used in a way of setting limits of what is socially and morally acceptable.

According to Wolfenstein children undergo many frustrations and difficulties which are sometimes very hard to deal with. Humour is one of the ways how to do it. They transform anxieties and disappointments into the funny. It is also an enormous difference between humour preference of adults and children. Children, especially of the youngest age group, prefer situational humour which is often underestimated and overlooked by adults. On the other hand, when adults are choosing a book for a child they often decide for a book which is didactic, and it seems humour needs to provide a moral or social lesson to be esteemed. It seems Dahl understood what children find funny, and what they desire, and it is truly noticeable in his writing.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ ALSTON, Ann a Catherine BUTLER. *Roald Dahl*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 39

⁴⁹ ALSTON, BUTLER, *Roald Dahl*.

7. Roald Dahl's Works for Adult Readers

Roald Dahl is perhaps best known for his books for children, however during his life he wrote many stories for adult readers as well. Dahl enjoyed telling stories and he was an excellent narrator. For Dahl, stories entailed a good source of money and one of his favourite stories was about how he started his writing career when being given a 1000 dollars cheque for his story about RAF pilot experience.⁵⁰ He published three collections of short stories *Someone Like You*, *Kiss, Kiss and Switch Bitch*. All of them were highly successful and they were translated into many different languages.

As I already mentioned, Dahl was quite a complicated personality. He was discerning, arrogant and sadistic. Even though he was one of the bestselling authors, his publisher almost terminated their contract because of Dahl's inappropriate behaviour. This applied also for his short stories which could be contemptuous and told just to tease or bully someone. "Dahl was, as a conversational storyteller, fond of stories with shock value. As a writer, he also exhibits the same quality. This made him a natural collector of contemporary legends which are, moreover, the sorts of stories that typically possess another quality he appreciated – a tight plot."⁵¹ One of the most important and difficult things about writing fiction is to find a good and original plot. When Dahl found a good one his trick was to write it down at once. He collected plots from stories which were told to him by other people. Because good plots were valuable he sometimes used them twice.

Dahl often used unexpected twists at the end of the stories and his readers usually share the innocence of his victims. For example, the reader of his short story "The Landlady" as well as the main protagonist does not know that the nice old lady who has her household full of stuffed animals is also a murdering psychopath who poisons and stuffs her tenants. As I have already mentioned, Dahl often used contemporary legends as his theme for a short story. "In contemporary legends, as in Dahl's stories, the protagonists' true identities usually remain hidden until the end of the story."⁵² The themes are usually bizarre, unexpected or threatening incidents

⁵⁰ BURGER, Peter.: "Contemporary Legends in the Short Stories of Roald Dahl.", *Contemporary Legend (ns5)*: The Journal of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research. 2002

⁵¹ BURGER, Peter.: *Contemporary Legends*, p. 139

⁵² BURGER, Peter.: *Contemporary Legends*, p. 148

which Dahl treated as a mixture of horror and humour. Nowadays, when you ask people about Contemporary legends, many of them respond “you mean like those stories of Roald Dahl?” therefore it is possible that some of his stories may turn into legends themselves.⁵³

⁵³ BURGER, Peter.: “*Contemporary Legends in The Short Stories of Roald Dahl.*”, *Contemporary Legend (ns5)*: The Journal of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research. 2002

8. The Analysis of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is a novel firstly published in June 1964. The main protagonist Charlie Bucket is a boy who is raised in a very poor family. The third person narrating is used, however the attitude is subjective, because the narrator is sympathising with Charlie.

8.1. The Grotesque Characters

Firstly, I would like to start with characters of the book and their description, because some of them were given grotesque names which could reveal their character.

The first child who found the golden ticket was Augustus Gloop. According to Cambridge Dictionary the noun *gloop* means any thick liquid or sticky substance and this is how Dahl pictured Augustus in a book:

*“The picture showed a nine-year-old boy who was enormously fat he looked as though he had been blown up with a powerful pump. Great flabby folds of fat bulged out from every part of his body, and his face was like a monstrous ball of dough with two small greedy curranty eyes peering out upon the world”*⁵⁴

In my opinion, with this character Dahl tried to strike the problem of obesity and pampering. Which is obvious in a way how Augustus’ mother speaks about her son.

*“He eats so many bars of chocolate a day that it was almost impossible for him not to find one. Eating is his hobby, you know. That’s all he’s interested in. But still, that’s better than being a hooligan and shooting off a hip guns and things like that in his spare time, isn’t it? And what I always say is, he wouldn’t go on eating like he does unless he needed nourishment, would he? It’s all vitamins, anyway.”*⁵⁵

Nevertheless, at the end of the book Augustus is punished. Because of his greediness, he falls to the chocolate river and he ends up stuck in a pipe. Here we are getting into the grotesque feature of a boundary between the fearsome and the funny.

⁵⁴ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. 2016. Great Britain: Puffin Books, 2016, p. 26

⁵⁵ DAHL, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, p. 26-27

The situation seems to be funny at the beginning, however when Augustus disappears from the pipe, we start to be a bit worried. Here the boundary becomes genuinely thin. After the disappearance, the Oompa-Loompas sing a song about Augustus which is full of puns, exaggeration and jokes and we get slight assurance from Mr Wonka and the author himself that the boy will be fine.

Another character is Mike Teavee who does nothing else than watching television which is suggested by. He is pictured as:

“the nine-year-old boy seated before an enormous television set, with his eyes glued to the screen”⁵⁶.

In the book, Mike behaves as a loutish boy who is so fooled by violence in television that he perceives it as something normal. However, even Mike is punished for his behaviour when he disobeys adults. After Mike is sent to the television in million pieces and nobody knows if he ever comes back unharmed Mr Teavee finally realises that spending too much time in front of the television is not good for children. Roald Dahl's attitude to this topic is clearly visible in the Oompa-Loompas' song about Mike Teavee.

*“The most important thing we've learned,
So far as children are concerned,
Is never, NEVER, NEVER let
Them near your television set –
Or better still, just don't install
The idiotic thing at all.
....
It rots the senses in the head!
It kills imagination dead!
It clogs and clutters up the mind!
It makes a child so dull and blind
He can no longer understand
A fantasy, a fairyland!
His brain becomes as soft as cheese!
His powers of thinking rust and freeze!*

⁵⁶ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. 2016. Great Britain: Puffin Books, 2016, p. 39

He cannot think – He only sees!

Even Veruca Salt is very spoiled by her parents. She gets her punishment as well. When she demands a squirrel, and nobody give it to her immediately, she goes to get the squirrel on her own. However, squirrels ‘test her head and mark it as a ‘bad nut’ and they send her to the rubbish pipe which carries the rubbish to the incinerator. Now we are getting between fun and horror or a frightening again. Thus, even this time the reader is appeased that it might end up well.

“Don’t worry’ said Mr Wonka ‘there is always a chance that they’ve decided not to light it today.’ ”⁵⁷

In this part of Charlie and the Chocolate factory, we recognise the usage of black humour. Previously in the thesis black humour is defined as making fun of situations which are usually perceived as tragic, inappropriate or offensive. The above mentioned excerpt from this book would be usually perceived as a tragic event, where Veruca almost loses her life. However, in Charlie and the Chocolate factory is this scene intended as a humorous one.

The last character I would like to mention is professor Foulbody who is mentioned very briefly in the book.

“In far-off Russia, a woman called Charlotte Russe claimed to have found the second ticket, but it turned out to be a clever fake. The famous English scientists, Professor Foulbody, invented a machine which would tell you at once, without opening the wrapper of a bar of chocolate, whether or not there was a Golden Ticket hidden underneath it.”⁵⁸

As it is obvious Professor Foulbody was a fraud however, it is a scenario we might expect even from his grotesque name. According to the Cambridge dictionary ‘foul’ means an act that is against the rules of a sport. And undoubtedly the machine invented by him is ‘against the rules of the contest.

In the book there is a huge incongruity between the characters. When we compare Charlie Bucket, the poor, well behaved, humble and kind-hearted child and

⁵⁷ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. 2016. Great Britain: Puffin Books, 2016, p. 133-134

⁵⁸ DAHL, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, p. 28

on the other hand Augustus Gloop, Veruca Salt, Mike TeaVee and Violet Beauregarde who are all spoiled, loutish and disobedient, we simply feel that the incongruity and contrast is huge and grotesque.

8.2. Puns

Puns are seen as a great source of amusement by children of all age. Therefore, Roald Dahl utilizes this knowledge and his books for children are full of them. Roald Dahl indulges in creating of entirely new names for sweets made in The Chocolate factory.

It is hilarious is when Mr Wonka is introducing his inventions and they are passing room named Lickable wallpapers for nurseries and Mr Wonka is describing the appearance.

“It has pictures of fruit on it – bananas, apples, oranges, grapes, pineapples, strawberries and snozzberries.”

When reading the text quickly you might miss the word ‘snozzberries’ which is kind of Mr Wonka’s new fruit. The noun snozz is an English slang expression for nose.

There are many inventions made by Mr Wonka and their names are based on puns. One of Mr Wonka’s inventions is *Everlasting Gobstopper* which is invention especially for children who get very little pocket money.

“You can put an Everlasting Gobstopper in your mouth and you can suck it and suck it and suck it and suck it and it will never get any smaller.”⁵⁹

8.3. Absurdity

Absurdity is detected exceedingly often in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. For example, the whole factory is an entirely new world in comparison with the rest of the city or even with the rest of the world. The Wonka’s factory is a place where almost everything is possible and his inventions, sweets and the equipment of the factory are bizarre and absurd.

⁵⁹ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. 2016. Great Britain: Puffin Books, 2016, p. 106

*“Mr Wonka opened the door. They were looking down upon a lovely valley. There were green meadows on either side of the valley, and along the bottom of it there flowed a great brown river.”*⁶⁰

One of the most striking absurd things detected in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is Mr Wonka’s private yacht. I believe that every child reading this part would discover that it is not the usual look of a boat or a yacht.

*“I made her by hollowing out an enormous boiled sweet! Isn’t she beautiful! See how she comes cutting through the river! The gleaming pink boiled-sweet boat glided up to the riverbank.”*⁶¹

Another absurd situation happens when the crowd with Mr. Wonka arrives to the storeroom number 71 named *Whips – all shapes and sizes*. Everyone reading this part would think about why they have whips in a chocolate factory and the first thing which comes to our minds is usually related to violence, however Mr Wonka has got a convincing explanation.

*“‘Whips!’ cried Veruca ‘What on earth do you use whips for?’ ‘For whipping cream, of course’ said Mr Wonka ‘How could you whip cream without whips? Whipped cream isn’t a whipped cream unless it’s been whipped with whips. Just as poached egg isn’t a poached egg unless it’s been stolen from the woods in the dead of night’”*⁶²

Many of Mr Wonka’s inventions are absurd just from their description. Such as *Hair Toffee* which if you eat your hair will grow in half an hour. Or *a chewing-gum meal* which serves as a three-course dinner in one piece of chewing gum and many others such as *Eatable marshmallow pillows*, *Lickable wallpaper for nurseries*, *Hot ice creams for cold days*, *Cows that give chocolate milk* or *Lifting fizzy drinks*.

Another absurd thought appears when Mr Wonka and Mike Teavee are talking about sending breakfast through the Mr Wonka’s television and Mike admits that he would like to send the breakfast cereal. Mr Wonka’s explanation why is breakfast cereal repulsive and from what it is made of is absurd and after his statement, it is unlikely that

⁶⁰ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, 2016. Great Britain: Puffin Books, 2016, p. 77

⁶¹ DAHL, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, p. 96-97

⁶² DAHL, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, p. 102

children readers would eat breakfast cereals again. From the educational point of view, it would not probably be a favourite thing which an adult reads to his child.

*“Don’t mention that disgusting stuff in front of me! Do you know what breakfast cereal is made of? It’s made of all those little curly wooden shavings you find in pencil sharpeners!”*⁶³

8.4. Derision

As it is mentioned in the theoretical part, derision is based on laughing down to others. It is one of the grotesque features which is repeated in this book very often. Namely Oompa-Loompas’ songs about the misbehaved children. To highlight this, I have chosen a part of the song about Augustus Gloop.

*“Augustus Gloop! Augustus Gloop!
The great big greedy nincompoop!
How long could we allow this beast
To gorge and guzzle, feed and feast...”*⁶⁴

Another striking moment of using derision is when Mr Wonka speaks to Mrs Salt. The way of language he uses is quite rough but humorous. Although as a parent I would not like to see my child reading this part.

*“Veruca, darling,’ said Mrs Salt, ‘pay no attention to Mr Wonka! He’s lying to you!’ ‘My dear old fish,’ said Mr Wonka, ‘go and boil your head!’ ‘How dare you speak to me like that!’ shouted Mrs Salt. ‘Oh, do shut up’ said Mr Wonka.”*⁶⁵

Charlie and the Chocolate factory is an exceedingly amusing book with a touching story. Roald Dahl made sure that there is no time to be bored during the reading. There is an abundant occurrence of humorous scenes, the grotesque, puns and absurdity. Even though parents might not agree with every joke in the book, it is certain that the young reader will not be bored.

⁶³ DAHL, Roald. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, 2016. Great Britain: Puffin Books, 2016 p. 152

⁶⁴ DAHL, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, p. 93

⁶⁵ DAHL, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, p. 126

9. Analysis of Revolting Rhymes

Revolting Rhymes is a book of folk tales in verse, however it is not the usual version we know. Dahl took six classical fairy tales and reinterpreted them. The fairy tales which Dahl chose are “Cinderella”, “Jack and the Beanstalk”, “Snow White”, “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”, “Little Red Riding Hood” and “The Three Little Pigs”. The collection was published in 1982 and it was illustrated by Quentin Blake. Dahl probably intended this book for children from approximately 10 years old and above.

9.1. Cinderella

From the beginning of this story we are told that it is not the story everyone expects and that this one is much more “gory”. The identical part is which corresponds with the classical fairy tale that the Ugly Sisters go to the Palace Ball, however Cinderella is locked up in a cellar where rats “nibble her feet”. Which is a terrifying picture. The story starts being grotesque when we are told that the Palace ball is not a “fancy” occasion as we expected but a Disco and that Cindy is not a modest well-behaved and innocent girl but “a spoiled and demanding brat”. Dahl uses expressivity genuinely often to highlight the sense of the modern world in his stories.

*“She beat her fist against the wall,
And shouted, ‘Get me to the Ball!
There is a Disco at the Palace!
The rest have gone and I am jealous!
I want a dress! I want a coach!
And earrings and a diamond brooch!
And silver slippers, two of those!
And lovely nylon panty-hose!”⁶⁶*

Another grotesque situation occurs when the Prince is trying to stop Cindy from leaving the Disco and he grabs her dress and rips it off Cindy. Adults might see this scene as inappropriate for children, however many of young readers find it hilarious for sure.

⁶⁶ DAHL, Roald. *Revolting Rhymes*. Illustrations by Quentin BLAKE. London: Puffin Books, 2001, p. 3

*“The Prince cried, ‘No! Alas! Alack!’
He grabbed her dress to hold her back.
As Cindy shouted, ‘Let me go!’
The dress was ripped from head to toe.
She ran out in her underwear,
And lost one slipper on the stair.”⁶⁷*

Later in the story we move on to the Prince’s hunt for finding Cindy. Although an unpleasant situation happens when the slipper, which was previously exchanged by the Ugly Sisters, suits to one of them. This is the moment which the Prince cannot bear, he is horrified, gets mad and orders *“Off with her head”*. The second Ugly Sister does not even get a chance to try the slipper and her head is cut off immediately. This scene is full of exaggeration and violence and it is “gory” as the author highlighted in the beginning. This story is not ended with the happy ending of Cindy and the Prince as we are used to in the classical version. When Cindy realises that the Prince is not as awesome as she pictured him she asks The Magic Fairy for a decent man. The sense of the modern fairy tale is appreciable in this story. It is visible mainly on the usage of expressivity and the contemporary language.

9.2. Jack and the Beanstalk

Even this story is far from the usual plot. In the beginning we hear the same story as we know, however this one is full of verbal humour such as “She’s as old as billy-o”. When Jack trades their only cow for a beanstalk his mother gets hot under the collar and beats Jack persistently. However, the tool used to beat Jack is more modern than we can expect in a fairy tale. This part is quite violent for a children’s book, but the usage of such an incongruity between modern world and fairy tale is smiley even for an adult.

*“Then summoning up all her power
She beat the boy for half an hour,
Using (and nothing could be meaner)*

⁶⁷ DAHL, Roald. *Revolting Rhymes*. Illustrations by Quentin BLAKE. London: Puffin Books, 2001, p. 4

The handle of a vacuum-cleaner.''⁶⁸

Another occurrence of the incongruity between the modern world and the fairy tale is obvious when Jack's mother finds out that leaves at the top of the beanstalk are golden. She is talking about selling her old Mini Cooper and buying a new Rolls Royce.

'She yells out loud 'My sainted souls!

*I'll sell the Mini, buy a Rolls!''*⁶⁹

The ending of this tale is different from the original story where Jack and his mother live happily ever after. In Dahl's version, there is a humorous twist at the end of the story. Because the Giant can smell Jack, Jack's mother assumes, he didn't have a bath. She climbs the beanstalk on her own, however she is eaten by the Giant. Jack has a bath and after that he tries again to climb the beanstalk and the Giant smells nothing. Jack gathers so much gold he becomes a millionaire. Dahl used a didactic and educational ending of this fairy tale which is not usual in this book. Children are encouraged not to underestimate personal hygiene.

'He murmured softly, 'Golly-gosh,

'I guess I'll have to take a wash

'If I am going to climb this tree

'Without the Giant smelling me.

'In fact, a bath's my only hope ...

'He rushed indoors and grabbed the soap.

...

'A bath,' he said 'does seems to pay.

*'I'm going to have one every day.'''*⁷⁰

⁶⁸ DAHL, *Revolt Rhymes*, Illustrations by Quentin BLAKE. London: Puffin Books, 2001, p. 13

⁶⁹ DAHL, Roald. *Revolt Rhymes.*, p. 14

⁷⁰ DAHL, *Revolt Rhymes*, p. 18-19

9.3. Snow-White and the Seven Dwarfs

At the beginning of the story we come across incongruity between the modern world and the fairy tale once again.

“‘Oh, what a nuisance! What a life!

Now I must find another wife!’

(It’s never easy for a king

To find himself that sort of thing.)

He wrote to every magazine

And said, ‘I’m looking for a Queen.’”⁷¹

When the author is introducing a magic talking looking-glass and its abilities, he decides to introduce it in an unexpected, however humorous way which is far from the story readers are used to. The abilities are shown in a more complex way and it might persuade the reader that the mirror knows even other phrases than “You are the Queen sublime”.

“Ask it something day or night,

It always got the answer right.

For instance, if you were to say,

‘Oh Mirror, what’s for lunch today?’

The thing would answer in a trice,

‘Today it’s scrambled eggs and rice.’”⁷²

In this version of Snow-White the author uses a lot of modern language which makes the tale funnier for modern children. Namely:

“From now on, Queen, you’re Number Two.

⁷¹ DAHL, Roald. *Revolt Rhymes*. Illustrations by Quentin BLAKE. London: Puffin Books, 2001 p. 21

⁷² DAHL, *Revolt Rhymes*., p. 22

*'Snow-White is prettier than you'*⁷³

"She called the Huntsman to her study.

*She shouted at him, 'Listen, buddy!'"*⁷⁴

"She'd found it easy, being pretty,

*To hitch a ride in to the city"*⁷⁵

In the section of the tale, where the Huntsman instead of killing Snow-White goes to the butcher's shop and buys a bullock's heart and one steak we found ourselves somewhere between disgust and amusement. Although hearing that Miss Macklahose is eating the heart is sickening, the comment of the author that boiled heart is not tasty when not boiled properly is rather amusing. As it is mentioned in the theoretical part, the boundary between the disgust and the amusement is a typical feature of the grotesque.

"Then (this is the disgusting part)

The Queen sat down and ate the heart!

(I only hope she cooked it well.

*Boiled heart can be as tough as hell.)"*⁷⁶

In this fairy tale Dahl hits the topic of addiction and gambling, which is a very unusual topic for children. As it is mentioned in the chapter dealing with humour in the books written by Roald Dahl, working with taboo topics is one of the author's favourite things and it is the feature he uses genuinely often. At the end of the story an unexpected opinion of the author is given. It is not the right didactic ending of the story for children, however it is rather amusing.

"Each Dwarf and Snow-White got a share,

And each was soon a millionaire,

⁷³ DAHL, Roald. *Revolt Rhymes*. Illustrations by Quentin BLAKE. London: Puffin Books, 2001, p. 23

⁷⁴ DAHL, *Revolt Rhymes*, p. 23

⁷⁵ DAHL, *Revolt Rhymes*, p. 26

⁷⁶ DAHL, *Revolt Rhymes*, p. 24

Which shows that gambling's not a sin

Provided that you always win."⁷⁷

9.4. Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Analysing the story, many questionable topics were discovered. First of them is the opinion of the author that for being such a spoilt child and for doing so much harm to the family Goldilocks should be imprisoned. Dahl even calls it a tale of crime and he does a recapitulation of her crimes.

"Why loving parents cannot see

That this is actually a book

About a brazen little crook.

Had I the chance I wouldn't fail

To clap young Goldilocks in jail."⁷⁸

"Crime One, the prosecution case: She breaks and enters someone's place

Crime Two, the prosecutor notes: She steals a bowl of porridge oats.

Crime Three: She breaks a precious chair belonging to the Baby Bear

Crime Four: She smears each spotless sheet with filthy messes from her feet."⁷⁹

To look at Crime Four in detail, Goldilocks lies into bear's bed and not only does she not take off her shoes, but also there is a dog excrement on her shoes. It is again the author's usage of disgust to amuse people, however picturing a child as a criminal might not seem funny to all readers, it can be perceived as perverse.

"Her filthy shoes were thick and grime,

And mud and mush and slush and slime.

⁷⁷ DAHL, Roald. *Revolt Rhymes*. Illustrations by Quentin BLAKE. London: Puffin Books, 2001, p. 29

⁷⁸ DAHL, *Revolt Rhymes*, p. 31

⁷⁹ DAHL, *Revolt Rhymes*, p.36-37

Worse still, upon the heel of one

Was something that a dog had done.”⁸⁰

9.5. Little Red Riding Hood and the Woolf

This story starts as the one we all know. The wolf is hungry and he eats up the grandmother, however not with her clothes, which brings us to the idea he had to undress her before. Then he waits for Little Red Riding Hood and they get to the usual dialogue. Although instead of the last exclamation “What great big teeth you have!” Little Red Riding Hood says: “What a lovely great big furry coat you have on!”. Here we get to the unexpected twist of the story which makes Dahl’s book always a masterpiece.

“The small girl smiles. One eyelid flickers.

She whips a pistol from her knickers.

She aims it at the creature’s head

And bang bang bang, she shoots him dead.

...

A few weeks later, in the wood.

I came across Miss Riding Hood.

But what a change! No cloak of red,

No silly, hood upon her head.

She said, ‘Hello, and do please note

My lovely furry wolfskin coat.’”⁸¹

The ending is slightly radical and there is even no explanation where Little Red Riding Hood got a gun. However, for a child who is not satisfied with a wolf eating up grandma and Miss Riding Hood is this ending satisfactory and humorous.

⁸⁰ DAHL, Roald. *Revolt Rhymes*. Illustrations by Quentin BLAKE. London: Puffin Books, 2001, p.36

⁸¹ DAHL, *Revolt Rhymes*, p. 45-47

9.6. The Three Little Pigs

The Three Little Pigs is a fairy tale which is well-known to every child. One house is built of straw and it blown down. The second one is built of twigs however, it is blown down anyway. Even after two pigs which the wolf has already eaten he is still hungry and he has a problem with overeating. Overeating usually leads to obesity which is nowadays still a taboo theme and one of the problems of the modern society. Though as it is mentioned before usage of taboo topics in the stories is one of the Dahl's fancies.

“'Two juicy little pigs!' Wolf cried

'But still I am not satisfied!

'I know full well my tummy's bulging

'But oh, how I adore indulging.'”⁸²

Although what we do not expect it, this story is connected with the previous one, Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf. The last pig's house is made of bricks and the wolf wants to use a modern explosive, dynamite, to blow it up. At this point, the pig dials Miss Riding Hood and asks her to deal with the wolf. We would expect that this story would have its happy ending, however there is another twist when Miss Riding Hood is leaving after her job well done not just with another wolfskin coat, but also with a pigskin travelling case. Dahl uses the incongruity between the world of the fairy tale and the modern one as he has already done in the previous stories and he finishes the story with an unexpected twist.

“Ah, piglet, you must never trust

Young ladies from the upper crust.

For now, Miss Riding Hood, one notes,

Not only has two wolfskin coats,

But when she goes from place to place,

She has a pigskin travelling case.”⁸³

⁸² DAHL, Roald. *Revolting Rhymes*. Illustrations by Quentin BLAKE. London: Puffin Books, 2001, p. 52

Revolting Rhymes is a humorous book of reinterpreted fairy tales which is full of hilarious twists, repulsive situations and grotesque features. The versed stories are simple and comprehensible even to children around 10 years of age. With publishing this book, Roald Dahl made sure that the fairy tales will not be forgotten by the modern generation of children.

⁸³ DAHL, Roald. *Revolting Rhymes*. Illustrations by Quentin BLAKE. London: Puffin Books, 2001. p. 56

10. Analysis of Kiss Kiss

Kiss Kiss is a collection of short stories. It was published in 1960 by Alfred A. Knopf, however most of the stories included in this collection were previously published somewhere else. The collection consists of 11 short stories and it includes *The Landlady*, *William and Mary*, *The Way Up To Heaven*, *Parson's Pleasure*, *Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat*, *Royal Jelly*, *Georgy Gorgy*, *Genesis and Catastrophe*, *Edward the Conqueror*, *Pig* and *The Champion of the World*. Dahl's short stories have usually tight plot and at the end the unexpected twist supervene. The twist is mostly humorous and grotesque, however some of them are bizarre or shocking. Although the perception and appraisal is very individual with every single reader. Dahl enjoys finishing the story immediately after the unexpected twist, which gives a chance to engage reader's own imagination.

10.1. Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat

Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's coat is a very specific and humorous story. Mrs Bixby, a married woman, gets a mink coat from her lover. She is excited about the gift, however it is not so easy, because she needs an excuse for her husband to bring this coat home. She visits a pawnbroker and leaves there a coat in exchange for 50 dollars and a ticket without a name or address. She pretends to find the ticket in the taxi and sends her husband to pick it up on his way to work. Mrs Bixby is horrified when she receives a ridiculously small mink neckpiece. At this point she believes the pawnbroker deceived her, however the humorous twist happens when Mr Bixby's secretary-assistant was leaving for lunch in the mink coat. It might be seen as a humorous punishment for having a lover.

*"Mrs Bixby went out, slamming the door behind her. At that precise moment, Miss Pulteney, the secretary-assistant, came sailing past her down the corridor on her way to lunch. 'Isn't it a gorgeous day?' Miss Pulteney said as she went by, flashing a smile. There was a lilt in her walk, a little whiff of perfume attending her, and she looked like a queen, just exactly like a queen in the beautiful black mink coat that the Colonel had given to Mrs Bixby."*⁸⁴

⁸⁴ DAHL, Roald. *Kiss Kiss*. London: Penguin, 2011, p. 125

10.2. Parson's Pleasure

Another story published in this collection with humorous and unexpected ending is Parson's Pleasure. Mr. Boggis is an antique dealer, who profits from buying valuable furniture cheaply from credulous inhabitants in the countryside. To be more trustworthy he poses as a clergyman and president of the Society for the Preservation of Rare Furniture. During his trip to Buckinghamshire he comes across a farm where he finds inestimable Chippendale commode. He tries to persuade the owners he needs a new set of legs for a table he owns and after long persuading they sell him the commode for 20 pounds. While Boggis goes to get his car, the farmers assume that as a clergyman he does not own a big car and they decide to 'help him'. It is an unexpected ending indeed and a punishment for a person who tried to earn money cheating. The picture of farmers who are chopping the commode with the ax with an intention to help is hilarious and grotesque.

10.3. The Way Up to Heaven

The Way Up to Heaven is a story about Mrs. and Mr. Foster who are a wealthy couple in mature age. Mr. Foster has a nasty habit to let his wait and leave their house in the last minute before the departure. After such a long time of persuading to let her go, Mrs. Foster is finally leaving for Paris to see her grandchildren. At the day of the departure Mrs. Foster is waiting anxiously for her husband who wants to escort her to the airport and she already knows she is late. Nevertheless, the flight has been postponed due to a thick fog. Mrs. Foster wants to find a room near the airport and wait, however her husband insists on driving her home. The next day the same scene is repeating and Mrs. Foster is waiting for her husband again. This time Mr. Foster is looking for a present for the grandchildren which Mrs. Foster finds squeezed between the seats intentionally. Even though she hears a strange cracking noise she departs to Paris. After many letters written to her husband and six weeks later she stands before the front door of their house and she smells something strange. A moment later she discovers that her husband has been hacked in the elevator for all six weeks. The way

Mr. Foster dies is ironic because all their marriage Mrs. Foster had to wait for him and this time it was vice versa.

“There was a faint and curious odour in the air that she had never smelled before....She walked quickly across the hall and disappeared for a moment around the corner to the left, at the back. There was something deliberate and purposeful about this action...And when she returned a few seconds later, there was a little glimmer of satisfaction on her face.”⁸⁵

The ending of this short story is rather grotesque. The way how cool and calm Mrs. Foster remains while waiting for a repair man the same time is comical, however the perception might be different with every reader.

10.4. Pig

Pig is a controversial short story which is divided into eight sections. Each section moves us further with the story. The First section is about a new born baby named Lexington. Unfortunately, his parents were shot by accident when they tried to get to their own house. This act left Lexington an unwanted orphan, however when the situation seems hopeless, Lexington is adopted by old aunt Glosspan who lives in an isolated cottage in Virginia. She is strict a vegetarian and she raises Lexington the same way. Because of fear he will be served meat at public school she decides to educate him on her own. One of the subject is cooking and it turns out Lexington is very talented. Eventually he creates his own recipes and aunt Glosspan encourages him to write his own cookbook. A few years later aunt Glosspan dies and after her burial Lexington finds a letter with money which is telling him to get a death certificate and go to New York City to see her lawyer who tells him that he inherited 500,000 dollars, however the final sum he gets is 15,000 dollars. Lexington is grateful and because of hunger he goes to a nearby fast food, where he tastes pork for the first time. He is thrilled and he bribes employees to teach him this how to prepare this food. When he is told, it all starts at the slaughterhouse he goes to the mentioned place. Unfortunately, during the visitation one of the workers loops Lexington’s ankle with a chain and he is undercut and dies. The ending is extremely controversial and revolting. The irony is that

⁸⁵ DAHL, Roald. *Kiss Kiss*. London: Penguin, 2011, p. 68

Lexington is told at fast food that they do not even know if it is pork or human meat and later he is slaughtered like a pig in the slaughterhouse. It is ironical that the death of Lexington and the cook's prank are similar and only reader with a strong nature can see it as source of amusement. Dahl points out that isolation of children from exploration of the world and its cognition is not beneficial. It is well known, that Dahl enjoys balancing between disgust and amusement in his stories, however it he might overstepped the boundary.

“The cook raised his right hand and began scratching the rash on his neck. ‘Well’ he said, ‘all I can tell you is that I think it was a pig’s meat. ‘You mean you’re not sure? ‘One can’t ever be sure.’ ‘Than what else could it have been?’ ‘Well’ the cook said, speaking very slowly and still staring at the waiter. ‘There’s just a chance, you see, that it might have been a piece of human stuff.’”⁸⁶

During the analysis of Kiss Kiss, many interesting stories were read, however not all of them had features of the grotesque. That is also the reason why the analysis includes just the selection. Some of the stories might seem inappropriate and violating, instead of displaying the features of humour and the grotesque.

⁸⁶ DAHL, Roald. *Kiss Kiss*. London: Penguin, 2011, p. 258

12. Conclusion

The aim of my bachelor thesis was the literary analysis of Roald Dahl's books for children and for adults, namely *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Revolting Rhymes* and *Kiss Kiss*. Before I started the analysis, the theoretical part of the thesis was written. It showed that finding a reliable and relevant source for my thesis might be rather difficult. The first part covers the topic of biography of Roald Dahl. There are only few biographies of a good quality, however the sources were sufficient. From Roald Dahl's biography an interesting outcome came up. Dahl's service during World War II and his life in America had a huge impact on his writing career. It is evidential, because his first writing attempt was related to the topic of RAF pilots' folklore. The fact that he started writing books intended for children after his own descendants were born is fascinating.

Reaching the definition of the grotesque turned out to be a quite difficult task, insomuch as with each author a new definition was created and some of them were not in accord. The definition of humour and black humour specifically was also given, however the sources concerning black humour are rather limited. The important part of my theses concerned humour in children's literature, the changing features of humour and grotesque aspects changing with age of children. An interesting ascertainment occurred as for how Dahl was aware of these features and how he could use them masterfully. The last theoretical chapter was dedicated to Roald Dahl's writing style and his books intended for adult readers.

The main core of the thesis starts with the analysis of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which is a book for children readers. The analysis showed that it is a book full of grotesque features and humour. Dahl wrote *Charlie and the Chocolate factory* in order to amuse the readers from the beginning to the end of the book, which is full of puns, absurdity, black humour and amusement. The analysis of the second book, *Revolting Rhyme,s* revealed that the usage of verse and modernization of the plot was a productive move. Dahl secured that modern children will continue reading the fairy tales. The author used a lot of incongruity between the modern world and the world of the fairy tale and in every tale an unexpected twist occurs. The last book which was analysed was a collection of short stories *Kiss Kiss* intended for adult readers. Each

short story ended with an unexpected twist which was bizarre, revolting or grotesque and funny. It follows that not every story was suitable for my analysis.

Reading this collection as the last one in the order turned out to be a mistake, because after an incredible avalanche of the amusement and jokes, this collection seemed gently flat in comparison with the books for children. Many people might disagree with my analysis of the grotesque and humour in these books, however, it was already said in the theoretical part, that the perception of grotesque is unique and individual to every single reader.

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